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Bob Schmetz

"In case I get any electronic toys,
this is for Santa to fill up with
_____!"

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Unscramble the letters within each rectangle to form four ordinary words. Then rearrange the boxed letters to form the mystery word, which will complete the gag!

Gleam	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
REKLASP	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Charter	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
TYRATE	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Wretched	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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Cylinder	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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Stickeler's Puzzle on Page 12

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Kitchen Diva

Christmas Cake

My mother made a fruitcake every Christmas to give as a gift for my paternal grandmother. The cake was stored in a corner of the refrigerator for weeks, marinating in an alcohol-infused mixture. Even though I'm well known for my love of sweets, that green and red candied fruit-studded, boozy brown confection never tempted me.

For a while, fruitcakes fell out of favor, but it seems that everything old is new again, because fruitcakes are making a comeback ... as energy fuel for hikers!

"You've got a perfect food for a hiker who's trying to go the distance," said Brenda Braaten, a nutritionist who also bakes fruitcakes and owns Little Haven Hiker Services in Belden, California. "You're close to the same calories per gram in a fruitcake compared to a Snickers bar or a trail bar, but you're miles ahead on iron, magnesium, calcium," she said. "The mineral content is higher."

Old fashioned as they are though, Christmas cakes are for those of us who love the traditional foods of the holidays every bit as much as the newly invented confections. And while it's true that some fruit cakes are hard to love, others are a glamorous and -- yes -- delicious offering that reflects cherished customs and flavors that have been passed down for generations.

The first Christmas cakes were created in Britain and began life as something else entirely. Around the 16th century, during the early days of Christmas, a porridge was made to which dried fruits were added. By the 1800s, with the availability of flour, eggs and sugar, that simple cereal treat transformed into something more sophisticated. Over time, bakers spun the recipes into light and dark cakes, full of dried and candied fruit, or versions containing only nuts.

France's interpretation of a Christmas cake was a fussy, beautiful *Buche de Noel*. The recipe differed from tradition because it didn't contain fruit. Instead, a sponge cake filled with chocolate buttercream was rolled to look like a Yuletide log. It is still a scrumptious showstopper today.

In America, we have continued making these heritage recipes and added a few of our own. There is nothing that says holidays more than a striking Red Velvet Cake, or a Southern Lane Cake filled with candied fruit sandwiched between light fluffy layers of white cake, or a moist Apple Cake heady with spice, or your favorite variety of Coconut Cake

A cake at Christmas is a treat worthy of the holiday, whether it's an antique fruitcake recipe like the one created by Brenda Braaten, or more modern treats. Nothing says "celebration" like a slice of Christmas cake, the perfect holiday indulgence!

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DepositPhotos



BRENDA BRAATEN'S FRUITCAKE

- 8 ounces walnuts (2 cups)
- 8 ounces pecans (2 cups)
- 1/2 pound Brazil nuts (1 1/2 cups)
- 16 ounces pitted dates
- 15 ounces dried apricots
- 12 pitted prunes, halved
- 4 ounces mixed candied fruits (optional)
- 1/2 cup raisins
- 16 ounces maraschino cherries, drained (1 cup)
- 1 1/2 cup sifted unbleached flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 6 eggs
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 3/4 cup brandy

1. Heat oven to 300 F. Grease bottom and sides of a 9 by 5 by 3-inch loaf pan. Line with parchment paper.

2. Using a large bowl, combine the walnuts, pecans, Brazil nuts, dates, apricots, prunes, mixed candied fruits, raisins and the cherries. Sift flour, baking powder and salt over the nuts and fruits. Toss lightly to coat the fruit and nuts to prevent them from sinking to the bottom of the cake.

3. Beat eggs, sugar and vanilla until fluffy and light. Pour over nut and flour mixture, stirring gently to combine.

4. Fill prepared dish, pressing mixture firmly to keep its shape after baking. Bake for one hour. If fruits are browning too quickly, cover with foil.

5. Invert cake; peel off paper, turn right-side up, let stand on wire rack until cooled completely. When cool, pierce the cake at intervals with a fine skewer. Place the cake on a plate covered with cheesecloth. Pour the brandy over the top and sides. Let stand one hour.

6. Wrap the completely cold cake in the cheesecloth soaked in brandy, and again in foil, and store in an airtight container in a cool place for up to a month for a better flavor. Serves 6 to 8.

Angela Shelf Medearis is an award-winning children's author, culinary historian and the author of seven cookbooks. Her new cookbook is "The Kitchen Diva's Diabetic Cookbook." Her website is www.divapro.com. To see how-to videos, recipes and much, much more, Like Angela Shelf Medearis, The Kitchen Diva! on Facebook. Recipes may not be reprinted without permission from Angela Shelf Medearis.

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